

Turkey's Crimes Against Armenia Are Laid Bare In a Secret German Record Prepared at Potsdam

The Teuton Writer in His Report Acquits the Armenians of the Charge of Fomenting Rebellion

PRIOR to Turkey's surrender last fall the charges about the wholesale deportations and slaughter of Armenians were countered by the Turkish government, mainly with two assertions:

1. That the atrocities reported by the Entente press and summarized in the Bryce report did not take place at all.
2. That, inasmuch as there occurred deportations or wholesale executions, in certain isolated instances, they were based on regular legal proceedings and carried out as retaliatory or preventive measures in face of a monster conspiracy of Armenians against the safety of the Turkish empire.

These allegations of the Turkish government were circulated and endorsed throughout the war by the German press and public opinion. And still as far back as 1916 a book was published at Potsdam, revealing the Armenian horrors in their full scope and giving the lie to the Turkish government on both of the above points.

This book—the only German admission, so far known, of the Turkish guilt—entitled "Bericht über die Lage des Armenischen Volkes in der Türkei," or "Report on the Condition of the Armenian People in Turkey," was written by Dr. Johannes Lepsius, chairman of the German Orient Mission and of the German-Armenian Society, on the basis of extensive investigations conducted at the scene of the horrors. It establishes the following facts:

1. That the atrocities as reported in the Entente press and summarized in the Bryce report did take place.

2. That not in a single case were the measures enacted against the Armenians based on regular legal proceedings; that not only did the Armenian people not conspire or revolt against the safety of the Turkish empire, but that apart from a few isolated cases it refrained even from self-defense against aggression and torture; that the measures were carried out systematically with the extermination of the Armenian people as their avowed purpose.

This book, however, was not meant to enlighten the German public. It was printed secretly and bore on its title page the following warning:

"Strictly confidential. Use in the press prohibited."

In an article in last Sunday's Tribune Magazine we reproduced extracts from the first part of Dr. Lepsius's report, describing the horrors themselves. The article printed below takes up the question of responsibility as illuminated by the second part of the volume. A third article, to be published next Sunday, will deal with the economic and religious effects of the persecutions and with the part played by the German press in hoodwinking its own public in regard to the crimes of the Kaiser's ally.

By Eugene S. Bagger

THE report compiled by Dr. Johannes Lepsius reveals that in the vilayet of Van and the adjacent districts of the vilayet of Erzerum alone more than 254 Armenian villages were plundered, destroyed and depopulated. The total of villages thus treated must exceed 1,000. The most strenuous efforts of the Turkish government to establish the charge of "armed rebellion" against the entire Armenian people, by way of justifying the persecutions, resulted, according to Dr. Lepsius, in locating exactly six cases where organized resistance in arms was offered by Armenians. Six out of more than a thousand!

Dr. Lepsius shows conclusively that in these six cases there was no question of a rebellion supported from the outside, by the Russians, for instance. Armed resistance in these cases was nothing but spontaneous self-defense in an emergency. There is no evidence whatever to show—in fact, there is no possibility—that a connection existed among the six cases.

The most notable of these instances is known as the "rebellion of Van," emphasized by the Turkish reports as a terrible revolt against the Ottoman government and a war of extermination against the local Turkish population. Some shadow of plausibility was lent to this charge by the fact that the "rebels" were relieved, after a siege of thirty days, by the advance column of General Nikolayev's Russian army.

Says Dr. Lepsius: "It is important to nail down the fact that, according to the testimony of the American missionaries and the coinciding report on the reception of the Russian forces, the Armenians of Van had no connection whatever with the Russians and the Russo-Armenian Volunteers. Neither were they in the position to enter into communication with the Russians during the siege. The so-called 'Van rebellion' was an act of self-defense and an episode in the history of massacres not high treason. This is confirmed also by Germans who lived through the siege. The relief of Van was simply a stage in the Russian military operations against Northern Persia and the Van province, and not an enterprise for the benefit of the Armenians. The two events—the self-defense of the Van Armenians and the advance of the Russians—have no causal relation."

The second chapter of Dr. Lepsius's book deals with the distribution of responsibility for the horrors. It begins:

"From our report it becomes evident beyond doubt that the deportations were ordered and executed by the central government in Constantinople. A comprehensive measure like this, affecting a territory of 800,000 square kilometers (Armenia, Kurdistan, Asia Minor, Northern Syria and Mesopotamia), or an area equivalent to Germany, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland taken together, cannot have had casual and uncontrollable origins."

"The German press, which, reduced by lack of authentic news to guesswork, had to base its judgment of the events 'down in Turkey' not on the knowledge of facts, but on imagination, published lengthy explanations

to the effect that the Armenian massacres and deportations were in their character and scope comparable to the persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages.

"The Ottoman Turk is a harmless and good natured being," writes Count Reventlow in the "Deutsche Tageszeitung." "He is an extremely convenient object of exploitation up to the moment when, seized by despair, he rises in wrath against his torturers. However deplorable such extra-legal self-help be from the point of view of civilization, it is nevertheless obvious that just the Armenians . . . are least deserving of sympathy and pity on the part of the cultured world."

"Of course, the writer is ignorant of the fact that 80 per cent of the Armenian population, and just that portion which was affected by the deportations in the first place, are peasants, who presumably were not engaged in a merciless exploitation of their neighbors, the Kurd brigands. . . . The fundamental assumption that in the case of the deportation and annihilation of the Armenian people we have to deal with 'extra-legal self-help,' is so obviously false that it needs no refutation."

"A considerable number of administrative officials in the provinces, such as Djelal Bey, Vali of Aleppo; Nakhim Bey, Vali of Smyrna; Djelal Bey, Vali of Erzerum; the Mustesarifs of Malatia, Nabl Bey and Reshid Pacha, and many Kaimakams (district governors) have objected, with or without success, to the execution of the measures. The Turkish population, living everywhere peacefully side by side with the Armenians, has repeatedly protested against the deportation and annihilation of its fellow citizens and made representations to the authorities."

"In a village near Kaisarieh the Turkish peasants, who lived in the best friendship with their Christian neighbors, attempted to prevent the deportation, and told the Kaimakam that if he insisted on carrying out the order they (the Turks) would go right along with the Christians. The Kaimakam had no choice but to withdraw the order temporarily. True enough, the mobs in the cities participated, inasmuch as the authorities let them, in the pillage of Armenian property, but in no instance was it a case of a spontaneous outbreak of popular passion, but simply a welcome opportunity for theft. It was the government itself that confiscated the lands, houses, stocks and furniture of the deported and auctioned off everything at ridiculous prices after the departure of the victims."

"What happened was the expropriation, carried out on the largest scale, of a million and a half of citizens who, through their ability and perseverance, contributed more than any other group to the improvement of the economic status of the country."

"In the reports we hit repeatedly on the fact that the provincial administrations were interfered with—assisted or hampered—in their measures by the organs of a camarilla which, although unofficial, bore the character of a higher instance. The organization of the clubs of the 'Committee of Union and Progress' was, in the same manner as the espionage system of Abdul

Any Kind of Peace With This Vulture Seems Repugnant



—From The Tribune of October 27, 1918

Hamid, the really decisive factor throughout the empire.

"This is not a party organization in the European sense, for it consists only of leaders and has no popular masses behind it. It is merely a thin crust of Turkish intellectuals and their tools. . . . In the Turkish parliament there is no opposition, although it was the governmental machinery that alone, in cooperation with the military authorities, could execute a measure such as the deportation and expropriation of the Armenian people, yet it was evident that the soul of the enterprise was the Committee of Union and Progress and its organs in the provinces. The committee saw to it that the proceedings should unroll as desired and should not be hampered by occasional stirrings of pity and humanity. Especially it was the task of the Young Turkish clubs to organize the armed gangs in which all available elements—Kurdish tribes, notorious brigands and discharged convicts—were utilized. The Turkish population must be cleared of the slander that it trespassed against its Armenian neighbors, with which it had been living in peace, as a matter of 'extra-legal self-help.'"

"It is unnecessary to insist on the fact that the systematically organized hordes of Kurds and criminal gangs which were let loose upon the deported did not require much urging to deal with the unfortunate victims to their hearts' content. However, the great mass of the butchered victims shall not be charged at all against the account of these legalized lawless elements, but against that of the government, the gendarmes and the Turkish militia."

Armenian Loyalty Praised
Dr. Lepsius now turns to an analysis of the situation at Constantinople in the first months of the world war. He points out that the Turkish official reports of the events in the Armenian territory made no effort to establish a systematic conspiracy on the part of the Armenians against the Turkish government. He says: "Only the persecutions were planned and executed systematically. No assertion was made by the Turkish government that the Armenian people as such had made themselves guilty of a revolutionary rising. For months one

could read in the Turkish press praises of Armenian loyalty to the Turkish Empire."

Here the following footnote is added: "The lie circulated in the (German) press about an 'Armenian revolution' was originated in a Copenhagen interview with the Young-Egyptian Rifaat Bey." Of this we shall hear more.

From the beginning of the war the Armenian press in Turkey preached unflinching loyalty to the Ottoman cause. The same was the attitude of the Armenian (Georgian) Church and of the Armenian intellectuals in Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Armenian soldiers, conscripted for the Turkish army, have distinguished themselves by their bravery.

Nevertheless, at the outbreak of the war the Armenians remained loyal to Turkey. They still hoped against hope to cash in on Young Turk gratitude. Moreover, they distrusted the Russia of the Czar. The Czarist government did not massacre Armenians in the Caucasus, but did exploit them. It also did its worst to create hostility between Armenians and Georgians, between Armenians and Tartars, and it suppressed the Armenian Church, which the Turks never did. Perhaps it may be put this way: The Armenians feared the Czar just a little more than they hated the Turks. So they chose the path, not of Masaryk toward Austria, but of Redmond toward England.

Their loyalty was acknowledged. Hussein Hilmi Pacha, the Turkish Ambassador in Vienna, said: "The Turkish government never doubted the loyalty and devotion of the Armenians." This was good enough, but Enver Pacha did better. He simply overflowed with praise and gratitude. Dr. Lepsius quotes Constantinople's German newspaper, the "Osmanischer Lloyd," which on February 26, 1915, printed a letter addressed by Enver to the Armenian Bishop of Konia acknowledging the faithfulness and bravery of Armenian soldiers. That letter might have been written by King George to Sir Douglas Haig, so grateful and enthusiastic was its tone.

On June 4, 1915, the Turkish government, according to Dr. Lepsius, issued the following statement:

"The reports that murders or even massacres of Armenians have taken place in Turkey are absolutely false. (Such reports were transmitted by the Havas Agency on May 24.) The Armenians of Erzerum, Tordian, Egin, Sas-

un, Bitlis, Mush and of Cilicia committed no acts whatever which might have disturbed public order and safety or which might have necessitated governmental measures."

This statement hatched to a plain truth one of the brazenest lies in history. The plain truth was contained in the last sentence, the lie in the first. It was true that the Armenians were innocent. It was also true that when this statement was issued more than 100,000 Armenians already had been deported or butchered. The evacuation of Cilicia was accomplished by the end of May, and the general deportations were in full swing. It is Dr. Lepsius who says this.

On August 27, 1915, the Turkish Consul General in Geneva, Zia Bey, issued, in behalf of the Turkish government, a formal denial of the reports of massacres circulated in the neutral and Entente press. He wrote: "The entire Armenian population, men, women and children, enjoy in complete safety the protection of the authorities. A few guilty persons have been sentenced by the legally constituted courts."

According to Dr. Lepsius, by the end of August, 1915, the wholesale deportations had already been carried out. Therefore the statement issued by Zia Bey is in need of special interpretation. When he says "the entire Armenian population, men, women and children, enjoy in complete safety the protection of the authorities," he probably refers to the authorities of another world where the majority of Armenian men, women and children had been transferred by their benevolent Turkish masters. As to the "few guilty persons," numbering about a million, the statement is quite correct, except that they were not sentenced by the legally constituted courts, but deported, massacred, plundered and raped by the gendarmes, militia and brigands, acting under orders from Constantinople.

Dr. Lepsius comments: "We are confronted here by the remarkable fact that the Turkish government, though admitting the execution of a few culprits, insisted not only in the first months, but as far back as September (1915), on being satisfied with the behavior of the Armenian people, and disclaimed any knowledge of a mass conspiracy of the Armenian

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Death Was Not the Worst Fate of Armenians; Pretty Women Underwent First All Sorts of Indignities

people, an act that it ought to have punished."

And now enters upon the scene Dr. Rifaat, the young Egyptian leader, member of the Committee of Union and Progress. The Copenhagen daily "Extrabladet" published on October 14, 1915, an interview with him, which was reprinted throughout the German press.

Tells of Armenian Plot

We quote Dr. Lepsius:

"He spoke of a conspiracy, embracing all Armenians in the Turkish Empire, threatening the very existence of the country and aiming at the delivery of Constantinople into the hands of the Allies. He even knew that 'unfortunately for the Armenians, the rebellion went off half-cocked, and at the same time the chief conspirator betrayed the whole conspiracy to the government in Constantinople.' He continued: 'Numerous documents, brought to light by the investigation, establish the fact that the English have organized the greatest rebellion in Turkish history. Numerous conspirators were jailed and sentenced, among them the leader of the rebellion in Arabia (!), the Sheikh Abdul Kerim. Although he and his followers were Mahometans, twenty-one of them were executed and 100 sentenced to long prison terms.'"

In other words, the Turkish government said in September there was no conspiracy. Dr. Rifaat said in October there was a conspiracy. Was there or was there not a conspiracy?

The fact is that Rifaat's statement mixes truth with lie in the approved manner of Zia Bey. Of course there was no Armenian conspiracy fostered by the English. But there was, indeed, an Arabian rebellion fostered by the English—a successful one, too, resulting in the establishment of the Kingdom of Hedjaz. It had, however, nothing to do with Armenians. Again, it is true that twenty-one "conspirators" were executed. They, however, were not Mahometans, but Armenians. Says Dr. Lepsius:

"From this number, twenty-one, and the rest of the interview the inference is unavoidable that Dr. Rifaat has purposely misled public opinion, inasmuch as he represented as 'a conspiracy embracing all Armenians in Turkey' the plot of the Turkish liberal opposition, aimed at the overthrow of the present government and the assassination of Talaat Bey and other Young Turk leaders. This plot, however, had been discovered prior to the outbreak of the war."

Story of The Conspiracy

Dr. Lepsius proceeds to give a detailed account of this conspiracy. Here is a summary:

The conspiracy in question was hatched as far back as 1912, and was the outcome of the rivalry between the ascendant Young Turk party, the Committee of Union and Progress, in Turkish briefly called Ittihad, on the one hand, and the Party of the Liberal Union, or Ittifaq, on the other. The head of the conspiracy was the exiled Prince Shabshaddin, leader of the Liberal party. He was supported by many prominent Turkish Liberals and also Old Turks. The two factions united in their hatred of Enver and Talaat.

One Armenian also was involved, Sabahgullian by name, Egyptian by citizenship. He used to belong to a committee of so-called "Hinchakists," a revolutionary organization of Armenians prominent chiefly in Russia. This Sabahgullian tried to communicate with the Armenians in Constantinople in behalf of the conspirators. Dr. Lepsius says he was utterly repudiated, not only by the Dashnakzagan, but even by the Hinchakists. The Armenians of Constantinople refused to support the plotters.

Dr. Lepsius tells of a Hinchakist conference held at Constanza, Rumania, in 1913, where an anti-Turkish resolution was proposed by a minority group. The Turkish Hinchakists repudiated the conference.

In the mean time a Turkish officer, Midhat Effendi, who had been initiated in the conspiracy at the outset, was regularly informing the Turkish government of the proceedings. The game went on for almost two years, until it was exposed in the Turkish "Daily Tanin" in a series of articles entitled "A Political Farce."

Dr. Lepsius emphasizes that this entire conspiracy, which was repeatedly and expressly repudiated by the Armenians in Turkey, was disclosed before the outbreak of the war.

The last document, delivered by the stool pigeon Midhat Effendi to the Turkish police, was dated July 22, 1914. Besides Sabahgullian, the Egyptian Armenian, who had been turned down by the responsible Armenian circles in Constantinople, the only Armenians involved in the plot were the four Egyptian Hinchakists who proposed at the Constanza conference the rejected anti-Turkish resolution. These four came to Constantinople and were

imprisoned there before the outbreak of the war.

This, then, was the conspiracy which, according to Dr. Rifaat, embraced all the Armenians in the Turkish Empire. Says Dr. Lepsius:

"Had the Turkish government immediately ordered the execution of the four Egyptian Hinchakists the matter would have come to an end and nobody would have conceived the idea to pass off the plot of the Turkish opposition for an Armenian rebellion. But, instead, the four Egyptians were kept in prison for a year and were first haled out on June 17, 1915. On this day the four Hinchakists were hanged in the square in front of the Ministry of War, together with seventeen other Armenians who, the government announced, were also members of the Hinchakist committee. In fact, the seventeen were not involved in the plot at all, but the Turkish police had secured a list of those attending the Constanza conference and a few of these were arrested. Others, whose addresses, obtained from the pocket-books and documents of the former, established them as their friends, were executed simply to arouse the semblance of an extensive conspiracy. . . ."

The publication of the interview with Dr. Rifaat proves that an attempt has been made to emphasize the execution of the twenty-one Hinchakists as evidence of a comprehensive Armenian revolution engineered with English money. Alas, the German press fell only too readily for this clumsy trick!"

Armenians Saw Warning

The execution of the twenty-one Hinchakists, says Dr. Lepsius, was received by the Armenian population of Constantinople as the foreboding of a long list of horrors to come. Yet they had previously received what may be called a mild intimation.

On April 25, 1915, the Constantinople police raided all Armenian clubs, offices and gathering places in the capital, as well as the homes of the most prominent Armenians. Two hundred and thirty-five Armenian intellectuals, of all walks of life, were arrested. In the following days 600 intellectuals were arrested and imprisoned. On what charge, for what reason, nobody knew.

The police, says Dr. Lepsius, searched frantically for evidence to justify arrests. "But it did not unearth a thing. The result of all the search was nil. Most of the prisoners were deported."

On May 12 one of the leaders of Dashnakzagan, Wartkes, the member for Erzerum, who for some reason or other escaped arrest, called on Talaat Bey to ask him for explanations. "Talaat Bey," Lepsius says, "was unable to refer to any revolutionary plans of the Dashnakzagan as justifying the deportations." But Talaat did something else.

"Said Talaat to Wartkes: 'In the days of our weakness (after the recapture of Adrianople in the Balkan War) you fell on our throats and raised the question of Armenian reforms. Therefore we are now going to take advantage of our present favorable situation. We are going to disperse your people in such a manner and to such an extent that it will knock the reform demands out of your heads for fifty years to come.'"

"Wartkes said: 'In other words, you are going to proceed with the work of Abdul Hamid.'"

"Talaat replied: 'Yes.'"

These same "reform demands" of the Armenians had been utilized by Abdul Hamid as a pretext for persecutions.

Asked Only For Safety

What did these demands consist of? Dr. Lepsius answers the question in a footnote:

"The reform movement of the Armenians never aimed at anything but safety for life and property and protection from the Kurd brigands. Pretty reasonable, is it not?"

Moreover, Dr. Lepsius points out that these "demands" of the Armenians were based on Clause 61 of the Treaty of Berlin.

Just because the Armenians demanded "safety for life and property, and protection from the Kurd brigands" the Turkish government found it necessary to exterminate a million or so of their number.

And Germany?

In the same footnote Dr. Lepsius refers to the efforts of the great powers to put through at the Sublime Porte the execution of Clause 61. He adds: "Germany also participated in a prominent manner in the reform negotiations of 1913, and urged the Porte to accept the programme formulated in the note of January 26, 1913."

This, it would seem, was as far as the German government would go. It is hardly likely that Dr. Lepsius, of whose sincerity and thoroughness the reader may, by this time, have formed a notion, would have made a deliberate effort to conceal the steps of his own government undertaken for the rescue of the Armenian people. One is inclined to assume, to put it mildly, that the German government did not exert itself to any particular extent in this particular field.